

Chapter - II

Tagore's Concept of Man: In the Light of Vedanta & Upanisad

Tagore was deeply influenced by Indian classical cripture & epics i.e. Vedanta, *Upanisads* and *Ramayana and Mahabharata* too much and he became one of the successors of Indian rich culture and heritage. He was deeply impressed by *Upanisads*, which led him to shape his own religious views. He frequently and spontaneously used *Īśa* and *Svetasvatara* in his metaphysical writing. His monism, his emphasis on the all pervasive character of God, his assertion of the kinship between man and man and between man and nature – are all taken from the *Upanisads*. It reveals in his poems, songs, drama, essays, novels and even in paintings: When he was just eleven, he learned *Gāyatri mantra* at the ceremony of his *upanayana*. He writes in his *Reminiscence*. “One occasion my father came to invest the three of us with the sacred thread (Upanaya) with the help of *pandit Vedanta vagish* he had collected the old Vedic rites for the purpose. For days together we were taught to chant in correct accents the selections form upanishads arranged my father under the name of ‘*Brahma Dharma*’ seated in the prayer hall with Becharam Babu. Finally with shaven heads and gold rings in our ears. We three budding *Brahimins* went into a three days retreat in a portion of the third story.... After we had attained full *Brahminhood* I become very keen on repeating the *Gāyatri*. It is hardly a text the full meaning of which I could have grasped at that age. I well remember what efforts I made to extend the range of my consciousness with the help of the initial invocation of ‘earth’, firmament and heaven. How I felt or thought it is difficult to express clearly but this much is certain that to be clear about the meaning of words is not the most important function of human

understanding. The main object of the teaching is not to explain meanings but to knock at the door of my mind.....

So, as I was saying though at that age I could not realize the full meaning of the *Gāyatrī*, there was something in me which could do without a complete understanding. I am reminded of a day when, as I was seated on the cemented floor in a corner of our Classroom meditating on the text, my eyes were overflowed with tears. Why these tears rolled down I know not; and to a strict cross-questioner I would probably have given some explanation having nothing to do with *Gāyatrī*.

“The fact is of the matter is that what is going on inner recesses of the conciseness is not always known to the dweller on the surface”¹
Tagore realized there in the *Gāyatrī* hymns that there is a deep relation between the human soul and universe. He said in the ‘Religion’ in the easy ‘*Santiniketan*’. “We know or not, we are having a eternal relation with *Brahma*, in that relation when we revive our soul only then we realize *Brahma*”.²

The hymns of *Upanayana* or *Gāyatrī* says

Om, Bhūr Bhuvah svah

The name of this part is called *Vyahrti* means collection form all around. It needs to make union all the three *Loka* (*Bhavaloka*, *Bhūloka*, *Svargaloka*) i.e. entire Universe should take with in the mind. It needs to realize that I am the global citizen, I do not reside in a particular country, state or village. The real *Arya* should once in a day come out from his home, stand under the sun, starts and make relation with the universe.

It is called transcendence, transcendence from the global world to the infinite universe.

Tat Savitur Varenyam bhargo devasya dhīmahi

We pray our homage to whom, who created this world the power of lord which is reflected in this universe.

Dhīyo yo nah pracodayat

We pray also to him who created as the rational being and with the help of his given rationality we pray to him. The inner world which is revelation of His rational power and the outside which is the reflection of his creativity. If we come to know that both of the worlds are created by the same omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent being then, we realize the deep relation with this single being to the variety of the universe. Only then we can come out from our selfishness and narrowness. In this way the *Gāyatri mantra* (hymns) makes a relation with the world to inner soul and inner limited soul to the great-unlimited soul. So the poet declared in his Habbart lecture - When I look back upon those days; it seems to me that unconsciously I followed the path of my Vedic ancestors.

In this way, Tagore was influenced by the *Upanisads* which led him to shape his own religious views. This influence was so basic that Tagore spontaneously and frequently used some of the upanisadic expressions like 'Íśa' and 'Svetasvatara' in almost his metaphysical writings. His monism emphasises on all the pervasive character of God. His assertion

of the kinship between man and man and between man and nature – are all based on the *Upanisads*.

The root of *Upanisads* are one –“*Ekam Sadvipra Vahudha Vadanti*”. It is the simple monism. It is said about Brahman- *Tattvamasi* or *soham*. *Tattva* is the last word of *upanisads*. ‘That’ or *Brahma* is called in *Upanisads Tattva*. He is the truth, alive and bliss, *Raso vai sah*, dualism is said in *Upanisad* but monism is its last word. Tagore realized *Upanisads* in the light of knowledge as well as love. When he speaks about *karma and bhakti*, it reveals its dualism and in wisdom or knowledge here *Brahma* reveals himself in monistic form. So, both is the path for us. We have to start with karma love and it leads up to wisdom.)

Further more he realized the inner culture of Indian civilization that there is a unity in diversity. Especially he realized this unity in the *Rikin* hymns. Poet was influenced deeply by these humns in his personal life and that is why these are reflected in his lifelong creation and also daily life. Practically he realized the power of union through one of the *Rikn* called *Gāyatrī*. Tagore said about the *Gāyatrī* that these hymns teach us the ultimate truth of the universe, the finite being and the infinite spiritual one, and they are united with each other.

Our country India accepts this hymns as a gist of all sacret religious criptures. Even when Tagore took help of the Vedic hymns at the *inauguration* ceremony of *Visvabhāratī*. Because to him these hymns have a power to make the human being united on a common platform, it gives the human being a common feeling. They could feel that they are not only individual being but also more than that.

He said – “On the inauguration day of Visvabharati we recites our ancestor’s Vedic hymns. These hymns that rishis call their entire follower that – “*Ayanth sarvathā svāhā*”³ they told more that all people should get union just like the water from all sources come out and get union in a ocean.”

So, it is clear to us that Vedic humns influenced him at his childhood as well as the time when he decided to establish The Visva - bhārati. He ^{worked} through out his life only for the union of human being.

Tagore had established an intensive relation with the entire world by the influence of *Gāyatrī* hymns. He could remember that afterwards at the ceremony of *Upanayan* he got the training from his father:-

Om

Bhubwah svah

Tat savitur varenyam

Bhargo devasya dhīmahi

Dhियो यो नः प्रचोदयात्

It means (approximate translation) ‘Om! Glory to Savitri the excellent, the effulgence of the Divine, let us meditate upon it. May it inspire us with understanding what is *Gāyatrī*. To express my consciousness”⁴ he remembered that incidence at the last stage of his life and he said – “This produced a sense of screen exaltation in me, the daily meditation upon the infinite being which unites in one stream of creation my mind and the outer world.”⁵

Usually the *Gāyatrī mantra* is given to a teenager of Brahmin origin during the *upanayana* ceremony. At that time the teenager becomes *dvija* or one of the twice-born. After the *upanayana* ceremony the *Dvija* is supposed to repeat the *mantra* every morning and evening and also on other important occasions. The origin of *Gāyatrī mantra* is from *Rīg-Veda* (III, 62:10). It is said that the syllables of this great *mantra* are the summation of all four vedas. The Visvāmitra states the twenty-four syllables of *Gāyatrī* are her twenty-four śaktis or powers. The mode of worship is according the form of śakti. Even *Vaśiṣṭha*, who had bitter fights with Visvāmitra, praised stating that even full criminal and the mentally retarded can attain benefits from the power of *Gāyatrī mantra*.

Actually Tagore realized the *Gāyatrī* hymns has a power which unites and binds all the multi cultural and multi religious vast Indian people. He said in his lectures human religion and human truth that this Hymns (*Gāyatrī*) give me the realization that I and the universe are fused with one and have no difference at all *Bhūr bhuvahsvah* this universe, inner world & I, are His parts. Who is in the beginning and end, is the ultimate source of our consciousness He connects me with the universe self through consciousness.

Tagore realized his God and he got a spiritual feeling time to time. He had not prescribed any way to reach the God. Suddenly he used to get a vision. One of the version he said in his *The Religion of man* –“when I was eighteen, a sudden spring breeze of religious experience for the first time came to my life and passed away leaving in my memory a direct message of spiritual reality. One day while I stood watching at early dawn. The sun sending its rays from behind the trees, I suddenly felt as if some ancient must had in a moment lifted from my sight, and the

morning light on the face of the world revealed an inner radiance of joy. The invisible screen of the common place was removed from all things and all men, and their ultimate significance was intensified in my mind".⁶

On that special day he wrote the poem '*Nirjharer Shapnabhanga*'. The spiritual world was not totally opened to him. Some times he felt the bliss of that partially opened world. And then the curtain was removed or veil totally and Tagore realized the real world and the inner truth of human life. He felt all the human being as himself even the porter and daily labourer when they were passing by the free school street, Tagore observed carefully their faces and structure of their bodies and he felt that all of them are passing by a tide of a ocean. They are the part of the ultimate truth, *the Brahman!*

There is little doubt that Tagore understood the essence of our life and existence through understanding of the *Upanisadic* ideas as exemplified in the world and the different parts of its creations. It can be said that Upanisadic idea of the presence of the divinity in man himself and in the things and beings of Nature *Raso Vai Sah* – that filled Tagore with the idea of wholeness or unity of creation. Tagore clearly said in his *Ātmaparicaya* that when he wrote *Prakritir Pratiśodh* in his early years he admitted that in believing in his world or in this society of human beings one could know the truth. In his play *Mālini* he pointed out that in apprehending the near from the distinct, the visible from the imaginative, one could perceive the religion whose object is to raise man above the self of the senses and his animal nature.

Tagore was fully acquainted with the entire Upanisadic tradition and as such carried the ideas of some of the Vedantic systems on his

thought like the *Advaitin*. He was impressed by the essential unity of everything. He gave value and importance to the *Suguna character* of the one like the *Viśistādvaita*. He tried to make a balance between the two. That is why, it is said that Tagore steers a middle course between Sankara and Ramanuja. He realized that there is no inconsistency in maintaining the essential unity of the one, along with the possibility of approaching it in the personalistic way. Overwhelmed by the ecstatic ways of the Vaisnava mystics. Tagore came to realize that the Advaitins way laid exclusive emphasis on the intellectual approach alone and neglected other kinds of approach not able that of love. Tagore realized the ultimate goal of *Vaisnavism* also is the realization of oneness. So, *Vaisnavism* helped him to realize the necessity and importance of opening the track of the heart for apprehending the one.

Reference:

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5. Tagore, Rabindranath: *The Religion of Man* (pg – 58), Unwin Books, London, 1970.
6. Ibid.